"Doing Family" and Religious Belonging of Immigrants. Case Studies in South Italy

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Abstract. This contribution is focused on the immigrant's re-shaping identity in the integration process through the phenomena of the "doing family" and religious belonging. It provides both theoretical analysis and empirical evidence of relationships between immigrants, the role of religion as a significant dimension of contemporary family migration and integration processes. What happens when people of diverse cultures, values, religion live together? Immigrants who "arrive" continue their life in a place where they do not passively participate over time but become actors. Pressed by the hegemonic culture of the host society, immigrants do not cease to practice their religious and origin cultural expressions. They do not renounce to constitute a family in a foreign contest in which they have to adapt, assimilate lifestyles, observe local laws. Considering the impact of religion and cultural origin values on public and private expression of differences, it is important to consider their role in the integration process. These dynamics have been analyzed in a research study on immigrants' integration process in Palermo. The analysis, focused on super-conformism and ethnic persistence of the most numerous immigrant communities in the context of analysis (Islamic *Ummah* and the Indian *Dharma)* delineated the integration declinations through syncretism and cultural contagions. Immigrants, participate in the construction of a local model of integration in which immigrants, free to express their religious and cultural differences, tend to reduce their perception of minority.

Keywords. family, religion, integration

1. Introduction

There has been an extraordinary surge in international migration in recent years. The 21st century will be the century of migrants. According to the International Organization on Migration [28] data at the end of the century there will be more regional and international migrants than ever recorded in history. Today there are about 1 billion migrants. Data highlights a trend in which every decade the percentage of migrants, as a share of the native population, continues to grow. In the next 25 years, the rate of migration is expected to be higher than in the last 25 years. This poses a range of challenges in the governance of multicultural societies and in particular in integration policies inspired by the cultural model of multiculturalism. The latter has a social value on the political localisms that must organize and sometimes mediate the encounter between opposing

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instances of insiders and outsiders. Multiculturalism concerns "The recognition of group differences in the public sphere of laws, democratic discourses and the terms of shared citizenship and identity" [1].

Within this complex scenario, Europe has become the first destination in the world in terms of migrants' arrivals. In a more patent way than ever, newcomers are obliging Europe to confront with the multi-faceted religious landscape of migrants' sending countries. The attempts to purify the public gender behaviors and the religion from Western influence in Nigeria (Boko Haram), the violent orthodoxy of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the increasing intolerance towards Christians in Egypt or the upsurging of religious nationalism in India are now irrupting in European society, through the arrival of people claiming protection or, at times, accused of corrupting "our" –European– religious identity, or even of importing the virus of religious intolerance and religious radicalism to Europe [2]. European public opinion looks at current migration as something from which "to defend itself," and is worried about not only the economic, but also the cultural impact of incoming flows, particularly when they are composed of migrants with a religious belonging different from that prevailing in host societies.

The topic of the immigrants' meanings of religiosity and religious belonging in the integration processes is re-proposed in the scientific debate after a long phase between the 19th and 20th centuries in which from America to Europe it was not thought or desired that the cultural and **"ethnic"** diversity of immigrants could take root in host societies. However, in the creeping assimilative ideology of integration policies there was an illusion that social institutions (schools, factories) would have erased the identities of origin and traditional residues. The problem that has turned out, especially in the most marginal social strata, is that assimilationism has limited the breathing space of immigrants living in conditions exposed to vulnerability, precariousness, insecurity. It has pushed them to live separated lives by differences, (dis)integrated into a daily life whose projects are non-existent, time is immutable, destiny inevitable [3]. In the political and intellectual *mainstream*, ethnic differences were confined to the private sphere and implicitly considered to be being overcome. In the political and intellectual *mainstream*, ethnic differences were confined to the private sphere and implicitly considered to be being overcome.

For a considerable number of immigrants, not only ethnicity but also religion is one of the pillars on which they build their subjective and collective identity as immigrants. [4]. According to Ambrosini [5] the analyses on the economic motivations of migration have neglected the cultural contexts in which migration choices are decided and pursued. In cultural contexts, they must be remembered: the *spiritual resources* that religions offer at the time of the decision to migrate, or the psychological effects that generate on the migrant the tribal propitiatory rites that strengthen the bond with the community, protect against adversity, act as a deterrent for those who do not repay the debt to the community that financed the emigration project; the *material resources offered* by religious institutions (centers of worship, charitable organizations) that assist and support in the difficulties of first settlement; the *social resources* of the networks of relationships established according to religious belonging or ethnic affiliations, that protect and reconstitute cultural identity, but above all facilitate insertion into the new context. In this sense, religious adherence provides migrants to translate into reality the hopes of a better life, thanks to the resources that religion has provided them.

Migration flows change the social configurations of host societies. Immigrants push local government policies to reduce socio-cultural obstacles to the development of integration processes. They force to review cultural and religious coordinates of the local

mainstream (that is, of cultural hegemony) due to the growth of an unprecedented religious pluralism. Then, what happens when people of different cultures, values, religion live together?

Immigrants who "arrive" continue their life in a place where they do not passively participate over time but become actors. For them religion and family are the symbolic identity references, both subjective and collective, of belonging and recognition that satisfy spiritual, material, and affective instances. Pressed by the hegemonic culture of the host society, immigrants do not cease to practice their religious and origin cultural expressions and they do not renounce to constitute a family. Considering the impact of religion and origin cultural values on public and private expression of differences, it is important to consider their role in the integration process. Specific forms of multiculturalism are determined, through religious syncretism, new models of contemporary family migration, genesis of transcultural, interreligious, and mixed families, reconfiguration of religious practices in the identity system of immigrants, especially when it is linked to migration.

Immigrant families continue to be the essence of belonging to a place. The sense of belonging binds together people separated by space but united by feelings. In a foreign land they experience the laceration of the absence, and the discontinuity of care. They fight for the reunion of their own family that has remained in their homeland. New families are made up or transnational ones are managed, at the cost of sacrifices and economic and affective deprivations. Between hopes and expectations of integration, new visions and behaviors in everyday life are introjected in immigrants, in the effort of "doing" and "being" family.

Religion is the most solid root of a culture and a tradition that, at least at the beginning of their integration path, they protect with determination. If immigration separates individuals, and sometimes their families, from relatives and friends, religion intervenes to reconnect migrants with what they have left in the country of origin. Separated by many social and moral anchors of their previous life, many immigrants cling to religion as an element of continuity who survives to the transfer to an alien context. Religion helps facing the impact with new cultures and new behaviors. Religious culture and its symbols are goods that all migrants carry with them and that, often, emphasize in the host country. The history of migration processes teaches that religious communities can perform very different social functions and sometimes with opposite outcome. Sometimes they constitute the symbolic walls of *gated communities* that paradoxically slow down the paths of integration; closed communities, impermeable to the outside, self-centering, nourish a static identity. Always equal to itself, alien if not antagonistic to the surrounding society. So not only as a protection but also as isolation from the social context. When, on the other hand, they open up to the outside and establish positive relations with the corresponding indigenous realities, religious communities can also be a bridge, an important driving factor in integration paths. Struggling with serious disadvantages, immigrants seek in religious communities an answer to the desire to remain connected with the past, but also to project themselves into the future. Integrate but do not get lost, through adaptation they acquire new skills and mental habits. They do not renounce their cultural identity. They learn to confront with a secularized society but continue to find a spiritual refuge in their own religious community.

These dynamics have been analyzed in a study on immigrants' integration process in Palermo. The paper is focused on the sociological understanding of the factors that can influence public and private family and religious practices in host countries. It reports on

the strategies of intergenerational transmission of religious values in immigrant families. Particular attention was paid to changing gender roles and family hierarchical relationships, which are guided and inspired by religious values, in the land of origin. Data show how immigrant integrations oscillates between attitudes of rejection of the "new culture" and of defense of that of origin, through practices whose expression changes in the public and private familiar sphere. The analysis of the immigrant communities delineates the integration declinations also through syncretism and cultural contagions in the patterns of the *Islamic Ummah* and *the Indian Dharma.*

The debate on the role of the religious dimension in the cultural identity processes of the societies is complicated by the immigration flows and the effects of integration policies. To enhance both scientific and political debate about religious based identities, affecting both the family migration sphere and the development of integration processes, we present empirical evidence of the relations between immigrant families and religious belongings. This paper presents the main results from research carried out in Palermo, a city of South Italy where immigrants' integration process has effects on identities of ethnic communities who are self-perceived and are perceived by natives as "different" for language, religion, culture. The analysis of the research data is focused on a case study about immigrants' integration in which immigrants tend to assimilate easier and tend to lean towards faster integration when there are wide spaces in the expression of religious and cultural differences of origin. The case study presented shows this.

2. Religion, integration: defining the concepts

In sociology there is no univocal definition of religion. This discipline has used the theoretical and empirical tools to analyze the phenomenology. The effort was to approach the religious phenomenon to understand it its value-based nature and to guide subjective and collective behavior. Which certainly implies a contextualization. Religion extends to all the symbolic spheres of social life, the latter sensitive to the historical pressures of transformation of structures and adaptation to new social phenomena. The religious phenomenon is characterized to trace the references of the memory and destiny of homogeneous communities from the point of view of faith. Through the religious phenomenon, the individual projects himself out of his own sphere, sacralizing a social order and the interests of a group, a social organization, a social order, which is not necessarily the one in which he is born [6].

The religious phenomenon presupposes greater freedom of choice of the identity characteristics of ethnicity or nationality. The latter, cumulative aggregative forms of history and culture, condition belonging and recognition, that is, the constitutive elements of identity. But they control the values for social guidance. In general, the individual through religion elevates the human phenomenon to divine. This happens in a twofold path: a) through the sacralization of the community, in its relationship with the outside world; b) through its spiritualization. This path of elevation, when implemented with orthodoxy, feeds in the protagonists' feelings of social distance. Think of the case of Jehovah's Witnesses, or Muslims, respectively in their health practices or in those constitutive of family units.

In the scientific literature, the role of religion in migration processes has been associated with the functions of refuge, respect, and resources [7]. According to Ambrosini [5] these functions play a fundamental role in the cultural contexts in which migration choices are decided and pursued. Many scholars seem to converge on the idea

that religion is a vital component in collective experiences of migrants [8], from the decision to leave to the support in settlement process. According to these scholars, the role of religion and religious practices of migrants in international migration processes have been overlooked. It is a set of references, practices, aids, which sanction the pervasive role of religion and related institutions in the phases of the processes, from the decision of departure to its preparation, travel, arrival, settlement, development of transnational links. Subsequently, in the course of integration processes, religious institutions become cornerstones of the defense of cultural heritage and the re-elaboration of identity.

The recovery of the religious issue can be explained as an effect of changes in the common sense. This sometimes happens in anxious or reactive forms to terrorist events, supposed fears of invasions, fear of the loss of Western religious roots and the loosening of the identity values of the host societies. In the latter, religious difference is proof of the unsurpassed diversity of immigrant populations, and especially Islamic ones [9]. Attributing the recovery of the religious issue to migratory dynamics, however, is only one of the most general aspects on which this scientific interest is reconstituted.

Religion guides the migrant in the disorder of the migratory experience. In fact, although they have chosen more or less voluntarily to migrate, he lives an alienating, lacerating, painful experience. They leave his affective references at home, the system of social relations useful to orient himself in time and space. They struggle, in a foreign land, to solve the problems of self-identification and social placement. Often, they do not know the language and the codified structure of norms and values of the host society. In the effort to reconstruct their own vital map, they seek in religion the "theological" answers on the profound questions of life, on the reason for suffering, on the ways of "making it".

Places of worship are also places of socialization that offer educational activities, welfare services and mutual exchange of information. If faith preserves group identity, religious affiliation offers internal cohesion and social status to immigrants in the face of hostility and prejudice they encounter in the external environment [10]. In the separation from many aspects of his previous life, the migrant clings to religion as an element of continuity to make himself survive, in temporal and spatial continuity, from the context left to the alien one. «Struggling with heavy disadvantages to save something of the old ways of life, immigrants direct the entire weight of their desire to remain connected with their past towards faith» [11]. Ultimately, the migrant finds in religion both a spiritual and identarian refuge through the role of «construction of identity, in the production of meanings and the formation of values» [12].

In research concerning immigration, criticism of the use of concepts alternates with programmatic definitions for new analysis models. According to Alba and Nee (1997), [13], integration and assimilation are terms often used synonymously. Integration ideally refers to a state of social life considered desirable and such as to make it possible for individuals to pursue a "good" or "civilized" life. In this conception, the term is associated with others such as democracy, social cohesion, justice, equality, as if to amplify its reference to what a society should be. Defining integration is complicated. It does not mean to circumscribe the semantic field, but to give it a political intention and a social value. Integration is the daily experience of meeting between different entities. It is a process that should ideally lead to an important level of social cohesion and reciprocity. About integration as path, scholars [14] seem to agree in determining the degree of integration of immigrants. The focus should be placed on the importance of subjective and institutional variables (work, legal status, local immigration policies, etc.).

Penninx and Martiniello [15] define integration as *the process of becoming an accepted part of society*. In this definition the outcome is desired, but not certain. In immigration research, the use of the term integration is alternated with programmatic definitions for new analysis. For example, integration and assimilation are terms often used interchangeably.

The complex model of Portes and DeWind [16] describes the distinct roles played by religions in the immigrant' integration processes. In this model religion is a point of support for the processes of selective acculturation [17]. Moreover, «religion plays a crucial role in the construction of identity, in the reproduction of meanings and in the formation of values» (Levitt 2003:251) [19] This function is particularly important in the alienating experience of the migrant, far from the original context in which everything was familiar, usual, ordered, predictable tackles pressing existential and identity questions. If immigration separates men from their contest of origin, religion allows their reunion, through religious services, celebrations and, anniversaries. Separated from many aspects of previous life, immigrants often cling to religion as an element of continuity and connection to their own world.

3. Research, Methodology and Theoretical frame

The research illustrated in this section aims to analyse the role of religion and culture of origin in the construction of the sense of belonging through the phenomenon of "doing family" in the local community, in which the independent variable is the degree of freedom enjoyed by immigrants in the public expression of ethnic differences. This case study integrates qualitative data and ethnographic observation. The approach adapted to develop the research pattern is the Grounded Theory of Glaser and Strauss [20]. The non-participant observation and statistical data used complete the description of the investigated scenarios. The data collection was carried out in 2016/18, through 60 interviews to immigrants residing in Palermo, grouped by age, gender, and ethnicity. The ages of respondent's range between 20 and 60 years. All Maghrebian immigrants interviewed are Muslims, as are the members of the Bangladeshi community. Those from Eastern Europe are all Orthodox Christian. The sub-Saharans ethnic groups belong to Evangelist, Catholic, and Muslim cults. The Tamil interviewed are evenly distributed between the Hindu and Catholic faiths. Using a semi-structured format, the interviews investigated: immigration paths; faith and religious values; public and private daily practices; cultural and religious practices. The analysis examined moreover the experiences of subjective identity in the spheres of religion. Each of these areas, was analysed through content analysis. In the data analysis, a multi-theoretical framework was used to broaden the perspectives of understanding the phenomena. Among these the theory of Status passage, in which society is considered as a network of dynamic and changing relationships, pushing to reflect on the new representations and configurations in which the social decomposes and recomposes. In the following analysis, we report extracts of the interviews we consider most relevant to the description and understanding of the phenomena investigated. The theoretical perspective of the "differential adaptation" has qualitatively outlined the analysis of the innovation/ethnic-persistence dialectics [21].

The refer to ethnicity rather than nationality was due to the sociological relevance of the factors that constitute and distinguish ethnic groups: a name, myths of descendancy, a shared history, a shared culture, a sense of solidarity among the members, and the reference to a territory, even if it is different from that in which you live [22]. These

factors define the differences among individuals of the research target population. The research excluded native Palermitans, choosing to focus on the perception of difference by immigrants. That is, on those who express their identity through distinctive factors in a foreign world. Background research gave shape to the hypothesis that to greater freedom enjoyed by immigrants in the expression of public differences would correspond the reduction in their being perceived as a cultural minority in multicultural contexts where adaptation is declined through syncretism, cultural contagions, and assimilation.

4. The research scenario

Palermo is one of the largest cities in South Italy. It is a city with a strong multi-ethnic historical, architectural, and religious identity. Today Palermo is one of the main landing and reception points of immigrants rescued through humanitarian missions in the Mediterranean Sea. The latest statistics by the National Institute of Statistic reported a total population of 647.422 residents in the Municipality of Palermo; 25,552 are foreigners. They represent about the 4% of the resident population, which is about half of the average Italian value, with a demographic growing annual trend of 2%. Palermo can be thought of as a multi-ethnic puzzle containing at least 128 different ethnic groups, if one considers, for example, that the Mauritian community in Palermo is comprised of 4 different ethnic groups (Hindu, Tamil, Telegu, and Marahati). The data reveal that in the foreign population residing in Palermo the female component prevails slightly, higher among foreigners from Central-Eastern Europe, Central and South America and East Africa. The male component, on the other hand, is more different among foreigners from the countries of Central south Asia, West Africa, and North Africa. The fertility rate is 2.3. The contribution to the city birth rate of foreign births is 19%. The average age of mothers at first birth is 28.4. In the last 5 years the fertility rate has decreased and the age of the first birth has increased. These data are close to those of the native population where the fertility rate is 1.4 and the age of mothers is 31 years. In general, the employment sector in which immigrants from Southeast Asian countries and Eastern Europe find their place in Palermo is the private care (domestic workers and caregivers). Commerce for those coming from the countries of the Maghreb. The Chinese mainly occupies the restaurant sector. For many years, the historical centre of the city was the primary residential neighbourhood of immigrants. Today, immigrants are distributed throughout the city, except in the wealthiest neighbourhoods, although distributed by community in some areas, according to the criteria of the cost of rents, the contiguity to places of worship and work, and the greater concentration of the community of origin.

5. Religious factors and familiar strategies in the choice of destination

The interviewees explain why immigrants chose Palermo and Italy as their destination. The interviewees reveal that these places have a strong appeal for some categories of immigrants. In many cases, Italy and Palermo are chosen because there is already a relative or an acquaintance who lives there, which can facilitate reception and integration. The origin religious factor is another of the reasons for choosing Palermo and Italy, especially for Catholic immigrants, who do not seem to face the differences in religious values related to lifestyle.

> I have been in Italy for over 15 years. I immediately came to live in Palermo. My sister was already living here, and so I decided to come and to find a job in Italy. I chose Italy because it is the seat of the Vatican and of the Catholic Church. [Vietnamese woman, 37 y. old].

Interviews indicate that for immigrants from Indian continent, therefore prevalently Hindu, their acculturation process is retained by differentiation of certain characteristics of the Western culture, such as: individualism, stress, or the lack of respect for the environment. Among these ethnic groups, Tamil and Sinhalese escaped from war and inter-ethnic conflicts. It is inevitable that the contact between the two hostile ethnic groups in their country of origin is different in the host city. They have no certainty of the final purpose of their journey, living with nostalgia and fear the return because it would mean going back to what they escaped from. This consciously transitory condition is only ideal because they know that they cannot return to their country of origin, at least until a solution to the conflict is reached. This constraint, on the one hand, has accelerated the integration process; on the other hand, it has generated feelings of strong attachment to one's own land and to traditions even in a foreign land.

As regards the decisions to migrate, the interviews did not exclusively lead back to subjective initiatives, but family strategies for maximizing income and increase in welfare opportunities for the entire family unit. These strategies usually coincide with the paths of upward social mobility, according to the models of the places of destination. Sometimes these strategies are in open contradiction with the religious values and the family hierarchy of the origin country. In these cases, it happens that the professional and family role of immigrant ethnic groups, traditionally linked to the restrictions of the roles of women, oscillates between persistence and innovation. As in the case of the extra-domestic work of Muslim women.

At the same time, the man reorganizes his social and family role also in the domestic context, both in work that he shares with his partner, either with limitations in terms of his own power or authority, tending to a greater symmetry with the partner. These role changes in the private sphere are identity bifurcations in the biographical path of individuals, which renegotiate with themselves and their own cultural world the fidelity values and the cost of identity treason.

> Since I have been in Palermo, the life I have with my wife has changed. She works out of home to earn more. Maybe we were westernized. In fact, I do not feel the property owner. Now there are two. [Tunisian man, Muslim, 44 y. old].

6. The cultural implications of the receiving society in immigrant families.

In the research the presence of minors, and even more so of adolescent cohorts, influences, by modifying them, the intra-family balances. The knowledge of the Italian language of immigrants is one of the main factors of integration that coagulates the difficulties of adaptation to a social and economic reality on which immigrants build their immigrant project. Knowing and expressing oneself correctly in the language of the host society means accrediting oneself in the cultural *mainstream* of social relations in which a position is sought. It means eliminating the sociolinguistic discrimination of the natives who in order to establish an effective understanding, use the verbs conjugating

them in the infinitive or recall the meaning through gestures. In the economic sphere it means increasing reliability and credibility.

In the case of some ethnic groups such as Filipinos and others of Southeast Asia, the maintenance of the origin's language is constant. Sometimes, even the refusal to speak Italian at home should not be considered as a refusal of integration, but as an essential requirement, to maintain family relationships and conduct family practices "with the same language as always".

These practices of ethnic persistence and cultural protection of origins are accompanied by attitudes and behaviors of remarkable integration, choosing to speak fluently in Italian, especially if among the family members there are minors, or adolescents.

It is above all through the knowledge and expression of the language of the natives that young people represent the driving family factor in the paths of integration. They are the first familiar linguistic-cultural mediators. They mediate between two cultural universes often very different from each other. They learn the language of the natives earlier, better, and faster than their parents, thanks to daily interaction with peers.

If children have more linguistic and formative resources than their parents, embarrassment is generated compared to the incapacities of the adults, weakening the authoritarian and pedagogical role. In the migration process the family unit is at risk. The risks are of self-exclusion of parents from the pedagogical guiding role. There is a real risk that the hierarchical potential of family power that the cultural tradition of origin entrusts above all to the male head of the family will be reduced. The latter faces these crises through renegotiations of its subjective and collective identity through strategies of adaptation and maximization of the emigration project. These strategies usually coincide with the paths of upward social mobility, according to the models of the places of destination. Sometimes such strategies are in open contradiction with the values and family hierarchies of the country of origin. In these cases, the professional and family roles of immigrants act in a field in which persistence and adaptation are intertwined making their emigration project more effective. This project plays the material and symbolic characteristics of a real investment.

The fear of (reciprocal) diversity between immigrants and natives has been confused in the daily life of the presences, occupying the interstices of professional, educational, and religious relations, acquiring greater visibility as neighbors, parents of their children's schoolmates who accompany and pick up their children every day when they leave school, participate in school or sports activities. On these occasions they entertain and socialize with the natives. We start to say hello, we participate in the same group chats. They exchange information and small utilities or services with each other. Frequenters of the same urban and social spaces, their extraneousness previously unusual, becomes daily, routine, predictable and risk-free. Entry into these networks of proximity elevates immigrants to legitimate components of the social environment of reference.

> My wife, who decided to be a housewife is very expansive and has many friendships with the mothers of the boys who do school with my children, and with them every now and then she goes out in the afternoon. [Mauritian man, hinduist, 50 y. old].

7. Emotive compensatory emotional trap of immigrant's families

Moving to a new country can be an arduous experience for anyone. The family shares and divides the stress of change equally among the members. The migration experience is lived differently among family members of different ages. Children live the immigration experience differently than their parents, especially if children are not involved in the discussion of immigrating to a new country. They are brought to an unfamiliar environment with little preparation. Children may feel powerless on a journey they did not even want to take. Newcomer children often struggle with feelings of loneliness as they miss their friends and extended family back home and may feel pressured to juggle traditional values and customs of parents with the local practices of their peers.

The presence of second-generation immigrants born in Palermo has a significant effect on the change of parents and families to which they belong, according to the model of the *downword assimilation*. Younger cohorts of immigrants are the main actors in the processes of adaptation and assimilation. They, through relationships with native peers, in classrooms and places of socialization, experience change in practices between the sexes, clothing, leisure time and food. From participation in the public dimension, they introject innovative roles and behaviors with respect to the cultural and religious values of origin that inevitably drag into the private family dimension. Sometimes it conflicts with intra-family resistance to contagions or emulations of the daily practices of the host society.

If young minors and adolescents reveal themselves as stimulating subjects in the processes of assimilation and adaptation, the analysis reveals that young immigrants experience an ambivalent identity condition. In comparison with their roots, they feel "squeezed between two worlds" [23; 24], oscillating between them. Adhering to both the cultural models of origin and those of the host society, they run the risk of non-recognition in either context, remaining prisoners of the "double absence". The changes in the family dynamics in question are not linear or coherent with respect to the search for a balance between the two cultural and value contexts. In practice, one can be accompanied by a nostalgic idealization of the country of origin, often supported by parents not satisfied of migratory experience. Or on the contrary, by doubts and denial of the cultural and family models of origin country through a strong push towards assimilation.

The problems that families initially face concern the satisfaction of basic needs: a job, a home adapted to family needs, effective communication with the local context through a language that is sometimes not known. These issues are addressed and managed by adults who bear the emotional burden of the migration experience as a whole. with the perspective of compensating for suffering and healing trauma, as evidenced by the research data. Sadness over separation from grandparents and friends, anxiety over uprooting caused by moving, and frustration over learning a new language, were among the challenges the parents identified.

> When we decided to leave, I did not imagine that my children would become sad, who would have suffered the lack of their grandparents. They missed their friends. Now I want their sufferings to be repaid with a better life. I want to give them everything I have not had in my life. [Bengalese man, 45 y. old].

The priority in the solution of basic needs, in the first phase of emigration projects, puts in the background the children's settlement issues as well. It is only in the later stages that all members of the family find a wider satisfaction. Socialization and adaptation of children to the new context, guaranteed by attendance at school, is further driven by participation in sports clubs and cultural projects of the belonging's community that allow children to interact with the larger community and improve their social interactions. If the path of integration, for younger cohorts, starts at school, it is complicated by the fact that, especially the second generations of immigrants, they wish to recover the essential components of their identity.

In these scenarios, religious affiliations also acquire a renewed strength and a role of legitimization of individual and family behaviors that if amplified in fundamentalisms, can be transformed into identity revenge on the hegemonic presences on the same territory. The amount of immigrant parents who give birth to their children in the places of origin is significant, to reduce the risk (or feeling) of loss of identity. Almost always perched within their own community and often within the territorial boundaries of the neighborhood of first settlement, they perceive and amplify the hostility that surrounds them. Frightened by the failures of so many of their compatriots and without hope for the future, they tend to exercise stringent control over their children. Worried that the latter emulate the immoral behavior of their Italian peers, and especially of their Italian peers, they limit their relationship life through prohibitions and impositions, exacerbating family control to the limit of the semi-imprisonment of female daughters.

8. The selective adaptation of immigrant's families

The sharing of spaces between people who at other times would not have had any contact with each other, has partly modified the forms of social relationship, which have reverberated in other city spaces where subjectivity is expressed: from work to the consumption of free time. But especially at school. Interviews reveal that adaptation proceeds selectively among immigrants, when choosing to grow their children in better areas, also bearing a higher cost of rent, and make the children feel more integrated and good citizen. Women's public roles change to suit those of new residentiality.

> I care about the environment where to bring up my children. I decided to pay a monthly rent of 600 euros because I am sure that the external environment of the area in which we live is more appropriate for my children so that they can feel integrated and above all good Palermitans. [Mauritian man, Hindu, 50 y. old].

> I have Palermitans friends because they are open people, especially those of the popular neighborhoods. For an immigrant it is a beautiful thing to have a Palermitan friend. On the other hand, the Palermitans of the higher social classes, such as those who live in the most elegant neighborhoods, are more closed and more reluctant to have contact with immigrants. Unfortunately, even here in Palermo there is the division into social classes. [Mauritian man, 38 y. old].

Belonging to the same faith does not seem to be an integration factor among Muslim immigrants of different ethnicity. The attendance of the mosques of Islamic devotees is divided by ethnicity. The "Grande Moschea" is attended exclusively by North Africans, while Muslim immigrants who come from sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia prefer

other mosques, all located within the Historical Town. The same division happens for other religions: Orthodox, Hindu, Pentecostal, etcetera. North African immigrants are Muslims, Africans, Asians, even of different ethnicities who speak different languages and dialects. About the ethnic fragmentation of worship places, the most plausible explanation is that being often cramped places, these are unable to accommodate all the faithful who in fact are divided according to the proximity factor of identity and housing. The difference and the social distance that immigrants articulate in reference to religious practices and frequency, generate a state of disintegration among immigrants, not strictly religious, that accentuates the "ethnic" criterion as a "discriminative" social category to establish new identities on which to base the social order.

9. Faith and Religious values. Re-Shaping Identity

Religion and values of origin constitute strong elements of guidance to action. Such behaviors (both the prohibited and permitted) do not appear to be factors impeding integration. In fact, they are actual spiritual and emotional supports that help immigrants to compensate the cultural stress of uprooting. The analyzed data confirm the value of religion for immigrants: *a)* as a medium to transmit values and cultural elements; *b)* as a spiritual, material, and social resource, that intervenes at various stages of the migration process, as shown by Ambrosini [5]. The analyzed data showed that for some categories of immigrants the universe of values coincides with that of the religious sphere. There is an overlap in these dimensions, especially in the older cohorts of men and women of North African and Southeast Asian Muslims. Moral values related to good and evil continue to run parallel to what is permitted or forbidden by their faith, especially in the private sphere. Religious prohibitions are expressions of ethnic values onto which difference is radicalized. The clothing of Western women is judged by such immigrants as proof of the sexual objectification of women and the devaluation of their moral integrity.

> In Palermo, women are too free, they dress uncovered and are more social than men: for example, they kiss to say goodbye. I do not accept that my wife goes to work alone, or that she behaves and dresses like the Italian women. My daughter will be free to choose whom to marry, but the important thing is that he is a man who works, honest, and Muslim Bangladeshi. [Muslim man, married, 40 y. old].

Religion as an identity refuge and protective shield against the cultural contagions of the host country, the elevation to sacred of the rules of behavior in public, imply a regression in the field of women's rights and condition, often interpreted as an opposition to the Western model of life. Data also shows that younger cohorts, more educated, and more recently come to reside in Palermo, exhibit a critical attitude towards traditional values, regarding behavior in both the public and private spheres. This includes the cases of premarital sex, abortion, or homosexuality.

> Although my religion would lead me to express another kind of thought, I believe that we are all modern now. So, I consider prohibition of sex before marriage to be an outdated concept. About homosexuality: I have nothing against homosexuals. [Ghanaian man, Muslim, 25 y. old].

In these cases, an elevated level of education seems to activate in people a critical reflection of the complex relationship between daily reality and the secularization of values. In our opinion, cultural adaptation is the deciding factor in the emotional changes among these individuals which have been exposed to confusion and disorder during a life that has lost its linearity, from country of origin to country of arrival. These alterations require an adaptation process forged through the autonomy of choices.

10. The Islamic *Ummah*. Being *Dharma*

The dynamic nature of culture and values, and their interweaving, reproduces and finds out points of contact with the social reality faced for the first time. Culture and religious values guide individuals in shaping a sense of belonging to the community. The comparative focus on the Islamic *Umma* and Hindu *Dharma* reveals how religion intervenes in assimilation processes weaving significant interactions with the host community, to the point that minorities reduce the self-perception of the minority. As we shall see, Islam and Hinduism are not considered *strictu sensu* religions. Both are considered by the faithful to be a stile of life in relationship with the "creation". Religious belonging is concretized in respect for norms, values, and rules of life as elevation to divine of earthly existence. If Islam and Hinduism are considered by the faithful as not religions but lifestyle, a way of being and interpreting one's life, it seems evident that in these cases religion is constituted in individuals as a factor of irreducible difference. Being and declaring oneself Islamic or Hinduist is not comparable to the spiritual dimensions that can unite other communities in which religion is only one of the dimensions that creates belonging. Rather, it is worth circumscribing an identity dimension that paradoxically is strengthened in religion.

The term Islam derives from three-letter Arabic which generates words with interrelated meanings, including "surrender", "submission", "commitment" and "peace". Beyond belief in specific doctrines and performance of important ritual acts. For Muslims men and women are the same but being equal does not mean being the same. According to the sacred scriptures Allah explains how, regardless of the gender of the person who does a good action, their reward is the same.

The relationship between Islam and the concept of gender equality (or more precisely the woman condition) is currently intended as problematic, anchored to an archaic but nevertheless evolving condition. According to a common Western perspective, Islamic countries are characterized by patriarchal gender norms, to the point of making their women in need "to be saved," exactly because they are supposed to be deprived of their personal freedom. Gender, product of a process of social construction, emerge as a variable social organization. In a cultural context, the mainstreaming ideas about masculinity and femininity as well the prevailing family model determine what in a society can be considered an appropriate role for a man and for a woman. Such gender norms impact on people's life at individual, domestic and social level. Even in family practices woman is subordinate to man. The traditional [2] divorce practices are a declination of the contradiction between the sacred enunciation of equality between man and woman and the reality of practices[3].

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[2] The stages of divorce are beatings to the wife, summoning of her relatives, "repudiation" pronounced three times by the man.

[3] Today, however, partially reorganized on a legal level of greater equality, in modern cultural contexts.

Ummah is a common Arabic word meaning "people, group", or "nation." The concept of *Ummah* might seem to correspond to the western understanding of a nation, but there are significant differences. In the Muslim way of thinking, the only *Ummah* that counts is the *Ummah Islamiyyah*, the Islamic Community, an entity that theoretically comprises all Muslims throughout the world, whatever their national origin. Muslims throughout the world share the same essential beliefs, values, and God-centered approach to the world.

In Italy, Islam is the second religion professed. Islam is an "immigrant" religion. In perspective, it will be a "resident" religion. Over the years, Islam will become a "transplanted" religion, not only because immigrants will continue to arrive, as for the second and third generations that are living and growing in Italy. The traditions and values of origin for Muslim immigrants, are not an obstacle to integration, but tensions in the effort to adaptation, including super-conformism and apparent contradictions, which evaporates when the family welfare becomes an element of self-realization and change of status. It is mostly those Muslim residents for a long time in Palermo to be interested in these typically Western paths of upward social mobility.

> In Italy I am very good, no lack of work and one earns well compared to our country. We have managed to have our girls graduated, to buy some apartments in Tunisia, that we rent as a bed & breakfast. My husband is a very traditional guy. He always decides what is to be done. In a few years we plan to go back to Tunisia, where we won't be as poor as in the past. [Tunisian woman, Muslim, 42 y. old].

Hinduism too is not just a religion, understood in the Western sense, related to dogma, church, clergy, divine revelation, but it is a set of beliefs, practices, cults, and rites that articulate all aspects of a man's life. For Hindus, *dharma* is a way of living in which the religious component is inseparable from the socio-cultural one. It is a way of living and being in agreement with society and its culture. More into orthodox Indian culture, the meaning of *dharma* is implicit in the word itself. *Dharma* (law, justice, duty) is the religion. It is the eternal immutable law, order, balance of creation, the moral law imprinted in the conscience of every individual to which the human being must conform. In the case of Hinduism, the identifying element is the *dharma*, which distinguishes Hindu from those who are not. *Dharma* is to the Hindu what makes a man Hindu. Only those who were born on Indian soil are Hindu. Membership in the Hindu religion absorbs the class membership.

From a sociological point of view, religious values are deeply nestled in social organization characterized by the respect of tradition that becomes a defensive instrument against the processes of transformation and gender inequality. In the analysis, for the Hindu Tamil and Mauritian communities, the religious belonging and the collective identity reinforce each other. In these communities, the wish (or need) to develop and strengthen their own cultural identity emphasizes the religious dimension of membership. The Sinhalese are mostly Buddhist, the rest Christians. Most of Sri Lankan Tamils are Hindu or Christians. In Sri Lanka, among Tamils and Sinhalese, there are many caste divisions as the effect of Hindu influence coming from the subcontinent. Castes are rigid and unchanging. The transition from one caste to another is virtually impossible.

Emigration phenomena have mitigated the rigidity of the obligations connected to religion and the social order of caste. In the analysis of the interviews, it is evident how

the concept of caste survives only in the memory of the adult generations. With emigration the need to adapt to any type of work has caused the break of the link between caste and job, flattening social distinctions. Only for the occasion of weddings a trace of social distinctions emerges, in those cases in which a young Hindu marries a Hindu of different caste or a native Catholic. In these cases, marriage is not forbidden, but only hindered. This family organization is therefore guided by values which guide the actions of the subjects also in the wider society. Rather, they constitute an identity marker. This could hypothesize an essentialist vision of difference, in which individuals are unaware reproducers in traditions and rituals that postmodernity recedes to a frozen world, always equal to itself, while the rest of their world keeps running, but far.

> My family has been in Italy for over 20 years. In Palermo we feel perfectly integrated. I study at the university. I dress like Italian girls, but some traditions are unchanged. Last year my brother got married. My father addressed an intermediary who deals with combining marriages. He was looking for the best combination of people and families. We, Tamils, have a booklet of our profile that is done with the help of the stars. The intermediary with this booklet seeks the most suitable person, even with the economic level and the status of the families because we still have the castes that differentiate people. When he finds the right person, check the dowry that the woman brings. Usually the dowry consists of land, house, money. [Tamil woman, Hindu, 22 y. old].

When it comes to gender differences, in the context of origin, women tend to lean towards a natural "sobriety" even in the private sphere. In public, they are careful with their behavior. They avoid showing off, attracting attention. Within the family, a woman is totally subordinated to her husband, her mother, and older sisters of her husband. Women must obey and please the men of the family and are very silent in the presence of their husbands and, if asked, they limit themselves to intervening with small nods of the head. Some of them leave the room when the husband enters. Men are ascribed the tasks to provide for the family's livelihood, the household expenses, clothing for their wives and children. The freedom of the woman's spending is limited to food. In the case of non-essential purchases or greater expense, man returns to be a decision-maker.

Emigration has however diminished the rigor that characterized the status of women in the concept of *Dharma*.

This family organization is therefore guided by values that guide the actions of the subjects even in the wider society. Indeed, they constitute an identity marker. The consequence is that sometimes such value is the expression of a difference that is reified not only in behavior but in a vision of the world, a philosophy of life, from which one does not distance oneself. Thus, leaving its authenticity unchanged. These considerations would lead to hypothesize an essentialist vision of difference, in which individuals are unconscious reproducers of traditions and rites, that post-modernity retreats to a frozen world, always equal to itself, while the other world runs but far away.

11. Syncretism, cultural hybridization, and identity reconfigurations

The hybridization and the religious syncretism phenomena represent the creative spirit that resides in every culture, activated by the need to redefine the inclusion or exclusion coordinates. As in the case of the Catholic Tamil community that in Palermo is

protagonist of religious syncretism between the symbols of their culture and the local one. The syncretism process goes appropriating of practices and places dedicated to the cult of St. Rosalia patroness saint of Palermo (such as the Feast, and the pilgrimage to the sanctuary). These dynamics have a strong impact in the symbolic identity complex of natives who feel as stripped of a non-material identity resource that they must share with discomfort.

The Hinduism of the communities from Sri Lanka and Mauritius found in Palermo a wide space for expression, in which a syncretism of symbols and rites was created, aimed at maintaining the values and social organization of origin. A dedicated prayer space can be found in all houses, decorated with images of the Hindu pantheon, and with a place reserved for the image of St. Rosalia, venerated by Tamils for formal connections with an original cult from the homeland. This gets on to the annexation of the saint into the Hindu pantheon. In short, the syncretism of the Hindu cult of St. Rosalia is a religious expression perpetrated into the logic of ethnic persistence. If the identity markers, such as religious ones, can be factors of social distance in host societies, a strong sense of religious belonging makes the elements of distinction more meaningful. Sometimes, an immigrant community in the effort to accelerate the process of social integration in the new society assumes a more detached attitude towards cultural and religious traditions. This does not seem to occur in the Tamil community in Palermo. The saint is venerated devoutly according to the syncretism realized between the Christian religious cult and the Hindu one. The veneration of St. Rosalia tends to defeat the daily difficulties, and at the same time to re-establish the community's sense of identity. The Tamil syncretism of St. Rosalia is a coherent expression of patterns of action differentiated from the faith, but also chosen according to the aims of the people and within the environmental situations in which they live.

In conclusion, the two communities follow paths of integration in diverse ways. Muslim and Hindu immigrants, in the private sphere shall implement conservation in practices of their cultural identity by food, clothing, religious practices. Among these communities, immigrants seem to be adapt to conservative identity modes when "forced" by the visibility in public to be distinguished and recognized, primarily by their own community. If the public dimension of religious differences does not emerge as an identity marker, it does not emerge nor even the difference *tout court* as an evocative political value of a comparison (or antagonism) to be composed on a cultural level. The Islamic community seems to swing between super-conformism and apparent contradictions. The Hinduist seems more oriented to ethnic persistence and to tradition. The two paths are expressions of a differential adaptation expressed in some areas of life and not in others. The degree of difference is expressed by different groups of immigrants when they use different tactics and different paths towards integration. Even when religion is an essentialist factor of intense cultural and value alterity, however, it does not prevent integration.

12. Conclusions

When the migration experience changes the connotations of collective identity, culture and religious values are a set of granite traditions and rituals that individuals express. But origin's culture and values are not immutable. The dynamic nature of their interweaving reproduces and finds out points of contact with the reality of social interactions faced for the first time. It creates a balancing in the social distance between natives and immigrants.

Culture and religious values guide individuals in shaping a sense of belonging to the community. According to Bruce [22], this interpretation underestimates the deepest convictions that guide individuals in shaping a sense of belonging to the one's own community, in relation to religion. Two examples of this hypothesis were analyzed in the research in a comparative key: the Islamic *ummah* and Hindu *dharma*.

For these communities, religious diversity, rediscovered as an identity and oppositional trait, can become the catalyst for a condition of exclusion, a sort of rationalization and subjective reappropriation of marginality. In a positive sense it can be the place of formation of new identities and social practices that help to withstand discrimination and to recover a positive vision of oneself.

More generally, for the various immigrant communities analyzed in the research religion and family are the symbolic identity references, both subjective and collective, of belonging and recognition that satisfy spiritual, material, and affective instances. Religion, especially in its more traditional and collective forms, assume significant characteristics in relation to the immigration path, since for many immigrants' religions belonging is not a secondary dimension of their identity. Religion influences distinct phases of the emigration project, from the decision to leave to the first settlement and the subsequent phases of the process of familiar acculturation, involving potentially the process of identity redefinition.

In the separation from many aspects of the previous life the immigrants cling to religion as an element of continuity that survives the transfer to a foreign context and satisfy the desire to remain connected with the past. Religious activities celebrated in the communities to which they belong satisfy the "need for community." Emigration is separation from families, from friends. Periodic religious meetings are an opportunity to meet other compatriots with whom to weave relationships of mutual professional help, exchange information on health services, bureaucratic, etc.

The hegemonic culture of the host society does not prevent immigrants to practice their religious and cultural expression of origin and they do not renounce to constitute a family even interreligious. Considering the impact of religion and cultural origin values on public and private expression of differences, it is important to consider their role in the integration process. Specific forms of multiculturalism are determined, through religious syncretism, new models of contemporary family migration, genesis of transcultural, interreligious, and mixed families, reconfiguration of religious practices in the identity system of immigrants, especially when it is linked to migration.

The data collected lead to a type of multiculturalism in which social production and identity areas are the product of both cultural hybridization and a change in the process of preserving one's origins. New cultural traits are incorporated, harmonizing them with the traditional, certainly with obvious contradictions, but without repudiating them or abandoning them altogether. The analysis of the interviews reports these methods immigrants' acculturation through the adoption of patterns of behavior, roles, nutrition, clothing, Italian culture, and in several cases, more properly locals.

We presented the "doing family" as a complex phenomenon which interweaves religious references, adaptation to local culture, reconfiguration of identity. For some ethnic groups, especially Asians, the phenomenon of arranged marriages is still present. The combination of unions is affected by the echoes of the difference between castes in which sometimes superstition has the role of rationalizing values and elevating them to guarantee the bond to be decreed between strangers. Fatalistic attitude and inevitability of destiny are not a renunciation of self-determination. They are an integral part of a set of traditions and religious rituals that trust in the values of the context of origin to

strengthen the identity of their community, when confronted with the diversity that can require the change. This in the dual effort to interpret the world, and to give a Weberian meaning to events. Ambiguity and Conflict [23, 25], with which cultural changes are determined within a community, cannot be read, as often happens in multiculturalist rhetoric, only in the integrative logics of assimilation or super conformism. It must be considered as a resource available to individuals, rather than a structure of ideas irreducible to change that limit their action.

Family is the place of life of behavioral contradictions in which individuals find subjective answers to the tensions of integration. In the family, innovation and preservation of identity traits coagulate in a symbolic space strongly subject to change. The discrepancies between cultural coherence and the redefinition of identities are a balancing play that puts a strain on family roles and the degree of family unity.

Analysis reveals both the modification of family hierarchies and the modification of ethnic persistence practices due to the degree of family integration. Adaptation and assimilation, conveyed in the single semantic container of integration, oscillate between persistence and innovation of the religious and family spheres. In the research, the degree of integration can be circumscribed in levels between those who are a) remarkably, b) moderately and c) badly integrated. With regard to the analytical categories, exhaustively described in Ferrante [26], the profiles of them are defined as follows: a) *interdependents participatory*, b) *marginal reluctants*, c) *prudent immatures*.

Finally, in the framework of the integration policies, the general theoretical elements deduced from the analysis, reveals that the integration process comes close to segmented assimilation, in which immigrants are assimilated in some areas of life and not in others, according to the model proposed by Portes and Zhou [27] in which different groups of immigrants follow different paths towards non-assimilation through modes of preservation of their identity. The tensions of adaptation are influenced by migration dynamics, when in the same territory resident immigrants of different faiths coexist. In these cases, it determines a competition between cultural minorities in which religion is a determining variable. In scenarios such as those described, religious affiliation also gains a renewed strength and legitimacy of the role of individual and social behavior.

The role of religion is decisive in the reconstruction of a moral order and social practices that gradually give back meaning to daily life. It acting as a factor of reaggregation of uprooted and dispersed populations of individuals from countries with totalitarian domination, at war, persecuted for their sexual orientation or religious affiliation.

The different degrees of integration involve immigrants' active critical reflections towards religion that bring them closer to those typical of secularized countries. This consideration is particularly evident among Muslim women when reveal to themselves that religious leaders may wrong in their interpretation because motivated by nonreligious aims. Thus, the choice to take a distance from religious radicalism is a way to rediscover and affirm one's religiosity.

The presence of a family pushes to weave relationships of proximity with the local context. In the latter, the socializing spheres of the school or of the daily purchases open the components to the confrontation with lifestyles that are assimilated even the risk of revisiting the intra-family hierarchical organization. The phenomena of retro-socialization in which parents learn from their children risk calling into question the pedagogical role of parents. We move from a minority condition to that accepted part of society in which the difference is no longer such. The comparison with the lifestyle, food, clothing of the host society, peer relationships, although they can generate resistance to

innovation support the empowerment of people who mainly risk being excluded and fueled by participative practices oriented toward the common good and active citizenship practices. The family context seems to play a decisive role in the integration paths of young people who can receive stimuli or slowdowns from the family to this process (especially if female) from the most traditional families and faithful to the religious-cultural values.

The public dimension of religious differences does not emerge as an identity factor. Neither does emerge when the difference is an evocative political value of a comparison (or antagonism) to be composed on a cultural level.

In conclusion, hypothesis is that in Palermo immigrants act in a public sphere where the assimilation process has reshaped the cultural and religious differences, no longer connoted by their divergence from Western tradition. This does not mean that Palermo has realized a perfect integration. To be more accurate, it means that in a socio-political climate of low pressure to integration, and instead of a place of substantial freedom of expression of differences, immigrants in Palermo do not need to claim their identity spaces.

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